

HABAKKUK Living By Pride

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] If you've just joined us for the first time tonight, we're partway through the Old Testament book of Habakkuk. It's a pretty straightforward, it's a short book, it's pretty straightforward, it's interesting, it's highly practical.

It's about how to face evil times, hard times. There might be evil times on an international scale or a national scale, they might be in fact quite personal evil times when they hit us and everything kind of comes crashing down in our world.

How do we stand in that moment? And this book is here to help us be prepared for when those times come as they will for all of us at some point and as they had for Habakkuk himself.

We go right back to the beginning of Habakkuk. He complains to God about the evil and the injustice that he sees in his own nation. In Judah, which is being perpetrated by God's own people.

And he wants to know why God seems to be okay with it, why God's not doing anything about this. And these are God's covenant people. And so for Habakkuk, he would be concluding that God's promises, which was to bless all the nations are not going to be fulfilled because God's people are corrupt here.

[1 : 27] And he wants to see God's glory displayed to the end of the earth. And it's not happening because God's people are corrupt. And God's response to Habakkuk came back really quickly and said, yes, I see the injustice.

I see the corruption. It really bothers me too. And I do have a plan to fix it. But if I told you the plan, you wouldn't understand the plan. And Habakkuk says, oh, come on, you know, tell me the plan, you know, please, please, please, please, please.

And God says, okay, here it is. What I'm going to do is I'm going to use the evil, ruthless, merciless schoolyard bullies, the Babylonians to come on in and to wipe out Judah.

That's what I'm going to do. They're going to judge them. I'm going to use the Babylonians to judge Judah. And Habakkuk is like, what? You're kidding me. How can such a wicked people be used by you to execute your judgment on people who are less wicked than them?

That makes no sense. And so all of a sudden, Habakkuk's complaint about the injustice and evil that he sees over there, it gets quite personal for him, because what he realizes is that when the Babylonians come to town, they're not just going to pick out, you know, the bad people.

[2 : 49] They're going to take on everyone. And so Habakkuk realizes that means that he is going to get caught up in God's judgment on those people over there. It makes no sense to him.

And you can kind of understand it. Some of you might remember this. Malcolm Naden was the most wanted person in New South Wales up until his captured arrest in 2012.

He was on the run from June 2005 to March 2012 when he was finally captured in his little remote cabin way out in the middle of nowhere past Gloucester.

Now, imagine you were one of the people and he'd existed in all this forest area for some time. And I'm trying to pin him down where he was. And in the time he was there, he was stealing from farmers and all that kind of stuff.

Now, imagine you're one of the farmers who's got a property out there somewhere between Gloucester and Armidale and you know this guy's wandering around.

[3 : 54] You want him caught. No doubt about it. You want this guy to be brought to justice. He's stolen from you and stolen from a bunch of your mates. And then all of a sudden you hear that New South Wales police have come up with a new plan to finally get Malcolm Naden.

And that is we are calling in Donald Trump to do a missile strike everywhere from Kempsey West to Armidale down south to Gloucester.

Just blanket the whole area with nuclear missiles. And you go, well, it has its strengths, that plan. You know, you finally get the guy who's embarrassed you by escaping from you seven times in the past.

Feral animals is a problem in that area. So you get rid of all the feral animals. That's good. There's a whole lot of other cash crops that are not quite legal yet in this country.

And you'd kind of wipe them out and all the hippies that are planting them as well. And so you kind of, you know, you solve a bunch of problems, but you also destroy everything, including me, the person who wants justice being done.

[5 : 13] And I'm getting caught up in it. And this appears to be God's strategy to deal with the injustices and the corruption of his people in Judah. And so Habakkuk now has a second complaint.

And his second complaint is bigger than his first complaint. And he states it in verse 13 of chapter one. Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

And then in verse 17, a couple of verses later, he's got another question about the Babylonians. And he says, is he to keep and emptying his nest, destroying nations without mercy?

Is he just going to keep going? Babylon just going to get away with it consistently and just keep destroying everything? In other words, Habakkuk saying, what about the Babylonians then?

You're going to judge Judah. What about the Babylonians? Are they just going to get away with it? And God says, no, you've got to be patient. I'm going to deal with the Babylonians, but it's not ultimately going to happen in your time.

[6 : 28] And so in verses six to 20, which is where we're up to today, is God's answer. And there's three things we want to look at. God judges all sin and evil, the source of all sin and evil.

And thirdly, God's solution to our sin and evil. So firstly, God judges all sin and evil. What you see in verses six to 20 is, or six to 18 especially, is Babylon is mocked as an empire.

It is mocked in five separate statements of woe, curses, five curses that have come upon Babylon. And even though Babylon in its time looked invincible, certainly in Habakkuk's time, it looked invincible.

God would ultimately bring Babylon to nothing in 539 BC when the Medes and the Persians came in and destroyed Babylon.

Now, each of these five woes that you see in these verses details the crimes that are perpetrated by Babylon and God's response to those crimes.

[7 : 37] And so we'll have a look at the first one, verses six to eight. Woe to him who piles up stolen goods and makes himself wealthy by extortion. How long must this go on? Will not your creditors suddenly arise?

Will they not wake up and make you tremble? Then you will become their prey. Because you have plundered many nations. The peoples who are left will plunder you.

For you have shed human blood. You have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them. So this is directed to Babylon's practice.

In fact, it would be directed to anyone who have acquired goods dishonestly. And what happens to those who acquire their goods dishonestly?

It says here, the tables are turned. The victims become the victor. And notice especially verse eight.

[8 : 35] Because you have plundered many nations, the peoples who are left will plunder you. And so what God does here is he relays to Habakkuk the very basic principles of his justice.

And that is the punishment always fits the crime. The punishment always fits the crime. And a little bit later in this section, it talks about God's justice coming around in circles.

The punishment fits the crime. And you see the pattern right through these five woes. So in verses nine to eleven, we have the plotter who exploits for personal gain.

And he does it so that he might gain things for himself or gain things for his nation or for his royal household. It's a direct attack on the Babylonian empire and the rulers of the Babylonian empire.

And what this is about in verses nine to eleven is about the pursuit of glory. They are doing everything in order to bring glory to themselves.

[9 : 59] They destroy nations. They shed blood. They plunder and pillage in order to clothe themselves in glory. And what's their punishment?

Verse 10 says that they will have shame instead of glory. Then in verses 12 to 13 is the promoter of violence. The foundation of Babylonian society was the blood of their enemies.

And their punishment is in verse 13. Has not the Lord Almighty determined that the people's labor is only fuel for the fire? They were building an empire by destroying other empires.

And God says you are building an empire which is just simply going to be firewood for my fire. In fact, James 5.5 in the New Testament speaks of rich oppressors who have fattened themselves up for the day of slaughter.

The punishment fits the crime. Again, verse 15. We have the immoral woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wine skin till they are drunk so that he can gaze on their naked bodies.

[11 : 13] You will be filled with shame instead of glory. Now it's your turn. Drink and let your nakedness be exposed.

The cup from the Lord's right hand is coming around to you. And disgrace will cover your glory. In other words, what they did is they puffed themselves up with glory by bringing shame to everyone else.

They made themselves feel better by putting down everyone else. And instead of glory, they received shame themselves. And the last woe is in verses 18 to 20.

It refers to the idolater. And idolatry, according to the Bible, is when we worship something that is less than us and certainly less than God. It's not just something that's less than God.

It's something that is less than us. It's speechless. It's powerless. And therefore, it is useless. And these Babylonians, they created idols to give them wisdom and guidance.

[12 : 22] And their punishment, when the time comes, when they need it, it says here, silence. No help. What you notice through here is that the punishment fits the crime.

And it's by that principle alone that both God's people, Judah, and the Babylonians will be judged by the same principle.

God is committed to justice. The wicked are not going to get away with their evil. God is going to hold them accountable for their actions. And he will punish them accordingly.

So that's good news for Habakkuk. But secondly, let's look at what the real issue here is. I've kind of alluded to it a number of times.

But what's the real issue here for the Babylonians? What is their source? What is the sin which is beneath the sin for them? Because the sin is they've gone bloodshed, they've gone and plundered and pillaged.

[13 : 33] But what's the real driving thing that's underneath all of that? And I think it's really essential for us to get to this point because it is so easy for us to sit back at this point and go, Ah, Babylonians, absolutely.

I mean, ruthless suckers, awful people. And frankly, they got what they deserved in 539 BC, if that's when you told me they were around.

And that's when they got destroyed. And they got exactly what they deserved. But I would never do these things. I would never do the stuff that's talked about here. And so this is not my sin.

This is not my failure. That's their failure. It's Michael Naden's failure and a bunch of other people's failure, but not mine. This is not me. I'm a good guy. That is, until you look at verse 4 and verse 18.

Verse 4, it says, The enemy is puffed up. We looked at this last week. James showed us this. It is inflating yourself.

[14 : 38] It is having an inflated view of yourself, puffing yourself up that others might glory in you. It goes on in verse 5, straight after.

It says that he, Babylon, is arrogant, never at rest, because he is as greedy as the grave and like death is never satisfied. He gathers to himself all the nations and takes captive all the people.

That's what it means to be puffed up. Greedy, never at rest, constantly dissatisfied and gathering all things for my glory.

In Babylon's case, they wiped out people for their own magnificence. And at the center, they're proud, they're arrogant, and they are empty.

They gather in the nations themselves. They conquer, they kill for their own glory. They are, in fact, what they're doing here is they are using and abusing people for their own promotion.

[15 : 45] And I wish that I had more time to unpack how we all do that. Maybe in a moment we will. In verse 16 says that everything that they did, they were doing it that they might clothe themselves with glory.

You see, at the heart of the evil Babylonian culture, at the heart of every culture, and at the heart of every life, is arrogance, pride, that leads to a life of pursuing personal glory at the cost of others, and certainly the cost of God.

Now, many of us don't immediately see that in ourselves. You know, I do good things. I recycle, and, you know. It's so much easier to identify it in other people when you see it in other people.

You know, the self-aggrandizement, the promotion, that sort of stuff. And I suspect that few, and I know this is not a, but here's a good example. Few would surpass the great, you know, boxing legend Muhammad Ali.

One person said of Muhammad Ali that Muhammad Ali thought the sun came up each morning in order to hear him crow. This guy roared on about how he was the greatest.

[17 : 18] He bragged consistently about his good looks, and he declared that nothing was impossible for him. And, in fact, he was bragged about himself until, ultimately, Parkinson's took away his ability to speak.

Here's a couple of his more memorable quotes, and, frankly, Google them, because there's a... You know, you can get yourself a cup of coffee and sit back and just read them. Here's a couple of them.

I'm young, I'm handsome, I'm fast, I can't possibly be beat. I'm hard... It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am. Bragging is when a person says something that they can't, and they can't do it.

I do what I say. But I love this one. I am the most recognized and loved man that ever lived. I mean, you could just, you know, anyway.

He qualifies it just a little bit. He says, because there weren't no satellites when Jesus and Moses were around, so people far in villages far away didn't even know about them.

[18 : 32] So he qualifies it a little bit. You know, maybe if Jesus was around when I'm around, you know, we could negotiate that a little bit. Incredible. Anyway, pride isn't easy.

When it's on display like that, it's kind of easy to see and not as easy to see in our own hearts. But the reason the Babylonians did what they did and the reason why we do what we do, even if it's preaching and singing and moving ahead in our career and creating artworks and sport, is because we are to a great degree insecure and trying to cover ourselves with honor and glory.

The great tennis player, Chris Ebbett, was in one year, and she was a great tennis player, but she said in one interview that the driving force behind her playing tennis and her passion to win was that when I won, I felt beautiful.

And in one way or another, that's us. I grew up being a fern for my practical skills.

As a child, I'd pull lawn mowers apart. This is what I do on my kind of after school stuff. And, you know, weekends, I pull lawn mowers apart and play with all the dad's tools and lose them and stuff like that.

[20 : 04] And in the early days, I didn't quite know how to put it back together again. And so that kind of frustrated dad a little bit. And when I got my first car, I bought this junk car.

It had grass growing up through the windscreen. And I regularly, you know, modified, rebuilt it. The engine pulled out. The gearbox pulled out this thing consistently. And I would have considered it in an embarrassment to take my car to a mechanic.

It was a matter of pride for me because I kind of, I know things practical. I know things mechanical. I built a whole extension on a house when I was 15. I went from cars and lawn mowers to repairs on bulldozers and excavators and, you know, all kinds.

I could just do this stuff. And when I was first married to Nat, she wasn't aware of my skill in this regard. And so it was important for me to tell her that I was so good at this.

And we had this, we bought this really cheap, junky car off a friend of ours, a second car. And they said to us when we bought it, you know, it needs a new clutch.

[21 : 15] And I'm like, yeah, clutch, you know, nothing. I can do that in an afternoon. I can pull a gearbox out and put a clutch in it easy. And anyway, so I got this car in the garage, jacked it all up.

And I'm under the car and I'm pulling things apart. And Natalie appeared at the garage door. And she said to me, do you know what you're doing?

I mean, it was important to teach her that I knew what I was doing. And so, but that comment to her in that moment, it's like, how do I know?

You know, I'm under the car. The car's jacked up. I've got overalls on. How do I not know what I'm doing here? It's plain obvious to everyone that I know what I'm doing. Such a challenge to my ego. Such a challenge to my worth and my sense of manhood and my pride and my glory.

And I was very, very unhappy about being questioned in this moment. And so I got out from under the car and I walked inside and proceeded to tell her how good it was at this.

[22 : 21] I've been doing this for years and I could do it with my eyes closed. And how dare you question me? And I'm doing it to save money and because I can. And so I packed up my bruised ego and I went back under the car.

And I was sitting there. I was fuming. I'm going to prove to her exactly how good I am at this sort of stuff. And she's going to appreciate me so much more. And I'm going to just, at the end of this day, this car is going to be fixed.

And she's going to be in the driver's seat. And she's going to feel the clutch on this car like she's never felt a clutch before operate in a car. And by the end of the day, we're going to sit over dinner and we are going to glory in my ability to fix this car.

That's what's going to happen. So I get under the car and I'm pulling bolts out and rip this. And what I did was I pulled the wrong set of bolts out.

And when I pulled it out, I pulled out the housing off the gearbox instead of pulling the whole gearbox off. And as I did that, I'm lying underneath this thing.

[23 : 24] And all of a sudden, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. Bits are hitting me, falling out of the gearbox. And there's ball bearings rolling all over the floor. And at that point, I realized, oh, I can't fix that.

I cannot fix that. And so I'm like, what do I do? This is lose-lose. The car's broken. Nat knows I can't fix it.

What do I? And so I scraped up all the bits and threw them in the bin. I rang the wrecker and said, how much will you give me for this car that has no gearbox working in it? 500 bucks, deal. Pick it up this afternoon.

And so it was gone by the end of the day. And the core issue in that moment was my pride. The core issue.

And I did what I, I had such pride in my ability. And when that happened, I realized this is beyond my ability now.

[24 : 26] And my, I went from glory to shame. And having to go back in and instead of taking that for a drive around in the car, start looking for another one instead.

Pride, pride in that moment resulted in me not treating her well. And it resulted in my shame at the same time.

Pride is a refusal to let God be God. It's to grab God's status for ourselves is what it is. It's independence from him and it's reliance in our own resources.

This is a cosmic, delusional fantasy of fantasies. It leaves us restless and empty at the center. We live lives of anxiety.

We live lives of arrogance. We live lives of bluff. And we look everywhere for people to puff up our shaky egos.

[25 : 34] I now go to a mechanic. Not for everything. Not for everything. But I now go to a mechanic. Pride is the foundation of sin and the source of all evil in our world.

Pride is the thing that let me treat Nat that way. And pride is the thing that resulted in Malcolm Naden murdering people. It's pride.

And I want to ask you, can you see yourself in that? And if you can't see yourself in that, then just keep coming to church and keep understanding Christian faith and the Christian gospel and how Jesus deals with that in our lives.

And pride is at one end of the passage, at the beginning of the passage, and idolatry is at the other end of the passage in verse 18.

You see, pride and idolatry are the two bookends of all of Babylon's sin in between. All Babylon's sinful actions are bookended by pride and idolatry.

[26 : 45] See, when you live independently of God, there's never a vacuum. Something else is worshipped instead. We are worshipping beings and something else comes in and takes that position.

And every culture and every life that is not based on the glory of God is based on an idol. It's based on a replacement God.

And it will take... Idolatry is taking something that is good and making that good the ultimate. It becomes the ultimate. It becomes the ultimate.

And we do it because of pride. If running fast is the way to feel good about yourself, then running becomes the ultimate for you. Until you run yourself into the ground.

Because it will never satisfy. Every one of us takes a good thing and makes it the ultimate and we look to it to give us the applause, the honour, the acclaim that only God can give us.

[27 : 52] And it creates seeds of destruction and it never satisfy. There is no rest. And pride is in the heart of every human and it's the source of every evil.

That is, the point is that we are no different than the Babylonians here. And we deserve God's punishment just as much as they deserve God's punishment. So what is the solution here to all of this?

You see, Habakkuk knew everyone in the world was a sinner. He knew he was a sinner as well. He also knew the holiness of God prevents him from ignoring that sin.

So how are we going to do this? Everyone's a sinner and God's holiness means I can't ignore it. And Habakkuk taught, as we saw last week in chapter 2 verse 4, that the only thing that can save us is faith.

Is the only thing that can save us. And faith in what? If you go into chapter 3, which is what we'll be doing next, is that we see that it's faith in God's mercy is the only thing that can save us.

[29 : 06] Trusting his mercy. But Habakkuk couldn't see ahead how God would preserve those two things. How God would preserve his holy hatred for sin and for pride.

And his merciful forgiveness for sinners. Who trust him at the same time. How's God going to hold those two things together? You see, because sin, like every single debt, requires a payment to be made.

It's a penalty. It has to be paid. And pride and guilt and shame cannot be dealt with unless someone pays for it.

Someone has to pay for it. There's a debt that's been accumulated. And just to say, well, a loving God to just go, forgive it. You know, forget about that. No relationship works like that in this world.

Not a single relationship works like that. A price has to be paid. Either you extract it from the person who owes it to you, or you bear it yourself.

[30 : 11] And you say, I forgive you, but you've still got to pay the price. And the only way God can pardon us and not judge us for our sin is by absorbing the payment that he requires himself.

And that is exactly what that passage in Hebrews tells us that was read out. Hebrews 9.26. He, this is Jesus, has appeared once and for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Just as people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. So Jesus, the innocent, does away with our sin by willingly dying where we should have.

Jesus quite literally turns God's anger away from us by taking it upon himself. He diverts it to himself.

Our destiny was to face the judgment of God, to get from him what we deserve. Instead, because of Jesus, the second half of verse 28 says, he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

[31 : 38] So the future for everyone who Jesus turns the anger of God away from is salvation instead of judgment. And there are those here who are waiting for Jesus.

They're the people that Habakkuk, earlier in chapter 2, James talked about those who are waiting patiently by faith. But there are also by implication here, those who are not waiting patiently by faith.

The destiny of the proud and the idolatrous who continue to hold God at one end and pursue idols, whatever it might be, is in the very next chapter in Hebrews 10, verse 26.

It says, If we deliberately keep on sinning after we receive the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who is treated as an unholy thing, the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace.

[32 : 55] For we know Him who said, It is mine to avenge, I'll repay. And again, the Lord will judge His people. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And on that day when it comes, it will appear clearly to all who, to everyone how utterly naive it was for millions upon millions and millions of people to live their lives as though the God who made this world for His glory would never call them to account on how little He has meant to them as they pursued glory for themselves.

That squares clearly with the teaching of the Bible and it squares clearly with reason itself. And so I urge you to ask yourself, Am I ready to take my stand in the divine courtroom and hear the judge pass an eternal sentence on me?

There will only be two verdicts, one of two verdicts, on that day. And one or two of them, one or each of them will be passed, one or the other will be passed on every person who has ever lived, either condemned or justified by faith in the Lord Jesus, hell or heaven, eternal death or eternal life.

For those who are by faith waiting for Jesus, there is hope, however, in these verses. And what they do is that they shape the way that we wait for Jesus now.

[34 : 55] And if you understand these two hopes, even in the most darkest times, the most difficult times as Habakkuk is currently facing, you will be able to stand.

You'll be able to face it. You can face anything with these two hopes. The first is in verse 20. And it is that in all the darkest of times, God is sovereign.

The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before him. Now, this is the God who is the exact opposite of the lifeless idols of Babylon in the verses previously.

This is not a dumb, lifeless idol. This is the God who it says is in his holy temple. That is, he is the one who exists and rules over all things.

It says that no matter how bad things get in life, God is in control, even when we don't understand it as Habakkuk doesn't understand it. He is not gone, even when we totally scrap our lives.

- [36 : 07] Even God, this God can even turn that around. Bad things will happen, but God is in it, controlling it, bringing it about for his good purposes.

He never, ever leaves his throne. And so the second part of that verse, let all the earth be silent before him, is a call for Babylon, a call for Judah, and a call for us to submit ourselves to him and his good, even at times not understandable plans as we wait for him.

That's what it means when it says, all the earth be silent before him. It's literally, shh, submit yourself to this God.

But the ultimate hope in this passage is in verse 14. For the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

It just, in amongst all the darkness of this section, there's just two glimpses. And what this one is saying is that a day will come when all evil kingdoms will be removed.

- [37 : 30] In fact, all evil will be removed. All sin will be removed. And only God's kingdom will remain. All rival kingdoms will be removed. And in fact, if you go into Revelation, the end of the Bible, 17, 18, it talks about Babylon there.

And Babylon, it's a judgment of Babylon. It's symbolic for all evil kingdoms finally coming to their end as God ushers in his glory filling everything.

This is finally fulfilled. Verse 14 is finally fulfilled when Jesus returns. His is the only glory that will last forever. And this verse tells us that despite how hard things are right now, someday we're going to soak in this.

We're going to soak in his glory. Jesus took our shame so that when we put our trust in him, our heavenly father clothes us with the honor and the glory of Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. So what glory are you pursuing? In a few short weeks, there will be glory for one team as they're crowned the FIFA World Cup champions and potentially for all their fans as well.

- [38 : 56] And in that moment, it will be exhilarating for them. Not for me. I don't really care. But it'll be exhilarating for them. And yet, it will be a glory that will pass.

It will be a glory that will pass. It will be brief. It will come. It will go. We all have our moments where it comes and goes.

And like all the pride-driven glory we attempt to clothe ourselves in, it just disappears. It's just brief.

It just goes. And what each one of those soccer players and fans needs and what we all need is something that lasts forever. A glory that is exhilarating, that lasts forever and that gives us true rest even when we're in the middle of hardships and we're not receiving the glory we think we should receive.

Rest for our souls now. We seek our own honour and therefore we deserve shame. And Jesus took our shame so that we would be clothed in his honour.

- [40 : 11] It's the great exchange. It is the only glory and honour that can really, truly satisfy our hearts. It's the beauty and the magnificence of a God who knows how bad and how deep and how ugly our shame is and yet chose to clothe us with glory and honour.

That's what each one of us needs. The honour of God, the applause of God, the love of God. And a day is coming, according to verse 14, when his glory will be everywhere and those of us who are waiting on him will soak in it forever.